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Viewing cable 07BOGOTA1033, NEW CRIMINAL GROUPS ARE LAW ENFORCEMENT THREAT,

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07BOGOTA1033	2007-02-13 17:19	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Bogota

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001033

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SUBJECT: NEW CRIMINAL GROUPS ARE LAW ENFORCEMENT THREAT,
SHADOW OF EX-PARAMILITARIES

REF: A. 06 BOGOTA 4750

[B](#). 06 BOGOTA 10691

[C](#). 06 BOGOTA 6262

[D](#). 07 BOGOTA 581

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

[1](#). (C) The GOC and OAS say the new criminal groups that have appeared in certain regions lack the organization, reach, and military capacity of the former AUC. Rather, they are primarily decentralized criminal operations that have used some demobilized paramilitaries, as well the former AUC's informant and drug processing/distribution networks, to continue narcotrafficking and other illegal activities. To date, the GOC's efforts to combat these groups and internal criminal feuds have resulted in 150 deaths, 909 captures, and 234 arrest warrants issued. The GOC believes the new groups are a law enforcement matter, not a national security threat, and is targeting them aggressively. End summary.

Who are the Emerging Criminal Groups?

[2](#). (C) The GOC and the Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia (MAPP/OAS) estimate there are 21 new criminal structures with roughly 3,000 members, among them common criminals, narcotraffickers, demobilized paramilitaries, and paramilitaries who never demobilized (ref B). Most leaders are former mid-level paramilitary members but, on average, demobilized paramilitaries account for less than 20 percent of the groups' members.

[3](#). (C) MAPP/OAS analysts say these groups are well-armed, but widely dispersed. They appear to have no political ideology, common organization or operations. They fight the FARC and ELN in Meta and Vichada for control of illegal activities, but, in general, do not mount the counterinsurgency-type operations conducted by the AUC. An exception is Narino, where OAS/MAPP head Sergio Caramagna and local UN High Commission for Refugees representative Roberto Maier told us members of the Organizacion Nueva Generacion cooperate with the Colombian military to combat the FARC. On the north coast, which was formerly controlled by paramilitary leader Jorge 40, the FARC and ELN presence is minimal, and the criminal groups function as an urban mafia.

[4](#). (C) Institute for Development and Peace Studies (Indepaz) Director Camilo Gonzalez confirmed to us on February 9 that the new groups do not consider themselves counterinsurgency forces. Their size and operations are much smaller than the former paramilitary forces. Still, similarities include their geographic areas of operations and the types of illegal activities in which they engage. Gonzalez said most group members who have died have been killed in internal battles over control of activities, such as narcotrafficking and extortion.

[5](#). (C) Despite some of the differences between the former AUC and the new criminal groups, the GOC's Communities at Risk Program Director Sandra Pinzon said on February 1 that grass roots communities suffering from the groups' criminal activities do not distinguish between them and the AUC. MAPP/OAS regional representatives agree, saying they have heard complaints that some new criminal groups use AUC emblems and other insignias, such as the Black Eagles, or

"Aguilas Negras," to instill fear. Still, the groups lack a national network such as the AUC, and only cooperate with each other when it advances their financial interests. Colonel Jose Humberto Henao, who is in charge of a special squadron to combat the groups in Norte de Santander, told us

on February 7 the national "myth" of the Aguilas Negras began in Norte de Santander, but he has not seen a broader effort by the group to expand its operations beyond the area.

GOC Response

16. (C) The GOC in March 2006 created an interagency group to coordinate efforts against the new groups (ref C). Director for Rural Security Police ("Carabineros") General Jesus A. Gomez Mendez directs this effort and told us on February 9 GOC actions to date have led to 150 deaths, 909 captures, and 234 arrest warrants issued. The GOC has also identified a further 459 members. Of the 30 criminal groups discovered so far, the GOC has forced nine to disband, captured seven ringleaders or financiers, and killed two more. In addition, five leaders or financiers were murdered by their own people. Of the 909 members captured, all remain under arrest. Some 166, or 18.3 percent, are demobilized paramilitaries.

17. (C) Gomez Mendez said the GOC's strategy to combat the groups involves: (1) collection of information; (2) verification and exchange of information; (3) execution of operations; and (4) legal investigation and prosecution. He is creating special squadrons to combat the new groups, and is boosting the number of police substations and personnel in areas most at risk. The first squadron was created in Norte de Santander early this year, and consists of Police, Armed Forces, Fiscalia, Department of Administrative Security (DAS), and Public Ministry officials. It delivered its first results in January with the discovery of a sizeable drug-processing laboratory belonging to an emerging criminal group in Los Patios, Norte de Santander. The CNP has also opened 15 new substations in vulnerable areas of Narino, Norte de Santander, Choco, Putumayo, Vichada, Casanare, Cordoba, and Cesar, manned by an average of 40 officers. Gomez Mendez said MAPP/OAS plans to monitor the 107 Carabinero Stations opened in areas with large demobilized populations. Police Intelligence analysts told us February 5 they are planning joint operations with the Finance Ministry to target the new groups' finances.

Remaining Challenges

18. (C) Gomez Mendez highlighted the three challenges to fully dismantle these structures: topography, infiltration, and money. First, most key leaders are hiding in rural areas or hard-to-reach places. Second, they have "collaborators and infiltrators" in their areas of operations and in GOC institutions that tip them off if there is an operation underway. XXXXXXXXXXXX Intel officer XXXXXXXXXXXX estimated that almost 250 of the approximately 330-340 members of new criminal groups operating in Uraba had prior military experience. These ex-military often receive advance notice of operations from their former colleagues. Lastly, there is "lots of money" in the business, which allows the groups to be well-armed and to corrupt public institutions, making it hard for the State to compete. Despite their growth, General Gomez Mendez does not believe the new groups will become a national threat if current GOC efforts against them continue.

19. (C) In contrast, MAPP/OAS and Indepaz analysts warned it would be hard to fully dismantle the groups because of their "mafia-like structures," including extensive informant and drug processing/distribution networks. MAPP/OAS Analytical Unit Coordinator Juan Carlos Garzon explained these groups could recover more easily than the FARC or ELN from GOC military actions because they do not need much leadership or

social base. MAPP/OAS and Indepaz regional representatives say the groups are rebuilding criminal networks previously run by the AUC.

¶10. (C) In some regions, residents complain criminal group members still assist the Public Forces. Former paramilitary leaders Macaco, El Aleman and Jorge 40 told MAPP/OAS officials there was an agreement with the GOC that their informant networks would be incorporated into the military's "red de cooperantes" program. DAS Director Andres Penate denied this. He said during the GOC-AUC negotiations, the GOC rejected an AUC proposal that some of its members be authorized to carry arms for self-defense. Instead, the GOC agreed to set up "red de cooperantes" networks--from which ex-paramilitaries were excluded--in areas where large numbers of demobilized settled. Still, XXXXXXXXXXXX intel officer XXXXXXXXXXXX told us he has incorporated former members of El Aleman's Elmer Cardenas block--with the approval of GOC civilian authorities--into his red de cooperantes. XXXXXXXXXXXX said the former paramilitaries are providing good information on a new criminal group in Uraba associated with ex-paramilitary leader Vicente Castano.

¶11. (C) Former paramilitary leaders Salvatore Mancuso and Carlos Mario Jimenez (AKA "Macaco") said paramilitary leaders who refused to demobilize were behind the creation of new paramilitary groups and 5,000 of the 31,000 paramilitaries who demobilized are rearming. Indepaz analysts noted Mancuso's and Macaco's comments were self-serving as they are seeking more benefits from the Justice and Peace Law process. Many observers agree that paramilitary leaders who refused to turn themselves in, such as Vicente Castano, "HH," "Cuchillo," and "Los Mellizos," are behind many of the new groups. OAS's Garzon doubted the ex-paramilitary leaders, who turned themselves in, involvement because could negate their favorable benefits under the Justice and Peace Law and they could be extradited.
DRUCKER